

N. Korea keeps up its missile barrage

Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea — North Korea fired at least six missiles into the sea on Thursday, including an intercontinental ballistic missile that triggered evacuation warnings and halted trains in northern Japan, adding to a recent barrage of weapons tests that has escalated tensions in the region.

The ICBM test was followed by launches of two short-range ballistic missiles in the morning, drawing swift condemnation by North Korea's neighbors and the United States, which reacted by extending joint air force exercises with South Korea.

South Korea's military said North Korea later fired three more short-range missiles into waters off its eastern coast. Those launches came an hour after a senior North Korean military official issued a statement threatening retaliation over the extension of the U.S.-South Korea drills. It wasn't immediately clear how far those missiles flew.

The launches are the latest in a series of North Korean weapons tests in recent months that have raised tensions. On Wednesday, North Korea fired more than 20 missiles, the most it has launched in a single day.

Experts say North Korea is escalating a

brinkmanship aimed at forcing the United States to accept it as a nuclear power and negotiating economic and security concessions from a position of strength.

The United States said in response to the launches that it's willing to take "all necessary measures" to ensure the safety of the American homeland and allies South Korea and Japan. The Biden administration also warned of unspecified "additional costs and consequences" if North Korea goes on to detonate a nuclear test device for the first time since September 2017.

Earlier Thursday, South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff said it detected that North Korea had fired an ICBM from an area near its capital, Pyongyang, at about 7:40 a.m. and then two short-range missiles an hour later from the nearby city of Kaechon that flew toward its eastern waters.

The longer-range missile appeared to be fired at a high angle, possibly to avoid entering the territory of neighbors, reaching a maximum altitude of 1,193 miles and traveling around 472 miles, according to South Korea's military. It wasn't immediately clear whether the launch was successful.

Japan's military announced similar flight details. It also said it lost track of one of the North Korean weapons, apparently the

ICBM, after it "disappeared" in skies above waters between the Korean Peninsula and Japan. South Korea said the short-range missiles traveled about 205 miles, falling closer to North Korea's eastern coast.

Choi Yong Soo, a South Korean navy captain who handles public affairs for Seoul's Defense Ministry, didn't answer directly when asked about the possibility of the ICBM launch being a failure, saying that it is still being analyzed.

Citing anonymous military sources, South Korea's Yonhap news agency reported that the missile possibly failed to maintain a normal flight following a stage separation.

The Japanese government initially feared North Korea fired a missile over its northern territory but later adjusted its assessment. Japanese Chief Cabinet Secretary Hirokazu Matsuno said the alerts were based on a trajectory analysis that indicated a flyover.

The office of Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida broadcast the "J-Alert" warnings through television, radio, cell-phones and public loudspeakers to residents of the northern prefectures of Miyagi, Yamagata and Niigata, instructing them to go inside strong buildings or underground.

UN: No evidence seen for Russia's 'dirty bomb' claim

Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine — The U.N.'s nuclear agency said Thursday that its inspectors found no evidence to support Russia's claim that Ukraine planned to build and detonate a radioactive "dirty bomb" with the intent of blaming it on Moscow.

The International Atomic Energy Agency said the inspections requested by the Ukrainian government "did not find any indications of undeclared nuclear activities and materials." The agency said its experts carried out inspections in three locations in Ukraine and were given unfettered access to the sites.

"Based on the evaluation of the results available to date and the information provided by Ukraine, the agency did not find any indications of undeclared nuclear ac-

tivities and materials at the locations," the agency said in a statement.

Top Russian officials, including President Vladimir Putin, have made repeated unfounded claims that Ukraine planned to detonate a bomb that scatters radioactive waste in a false flag operation it would try to pin on Moscow.

Russia's U.N. ambassador, Vassily Nebenzya, claimed in a letter to the U.N. Security Council members last week that Ukraine's nuclear research facility and mining company "received direct orders from (President Volodymyr) Zelenskyy's regime to develop such a dirty bomb."

Western nations had called Moscow's unproven allegation "transparently false." Ukrainian authorities dismissed it as an attempt to distract attention from alleged

Russian plans to set off a dirty bomb as a way to justify an escalation of hostilities.

Earlier Thursday, Ukraine's nuclear operator said that Russian shelling damaged power lines connecting Europe's largest nuclear power plant to the Ukrainian grid, leaving the plant again relying on emergency diesel generators.

As fighting in Ukraine has damaged power lines and electrical substations, the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant has repeatedly operated on backup generators to cool its reactors and keep other safety systems running until regular power could be restored. The generators have enough fuel to maintain the plant in southeastern Ukraine for just 15 days, state nuclear power company Energoatom said on its Telegram channel.

GOP blasts plan to replace Okinawa F-15s

By SETH ROBSON
Stars and Stripes

The Defense Department's plan to remove Air Force fighters from Okinawa sends the wrong signal to China and U.S. allies in the region, according to prominent Republicans in Congress seeking more information about the decision.

The lawmakers wrote to Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin on Tuesday asking to be briefed about a plan the Air Force announced Friday to replace two F-15 squadrons with rotational forces.

In their letter, Sen. Marco Rubio, of Florida; Rep. Mike Gallagher, of Wisconsin, the top Republican on the Armed Services

personnel subcommittee; Sen. Bill Hagerty, of Tennessee, the former ambassador to Japan; and Rep. Mike McCaul, of Texas, the top Republican on the Foreign Affairs Committee, expressed concerns about the message that the move sends.

"We are concerned that DOD's decision sends the wrong signal, not only to the [Chinese Communist Party], but also to our allies and partners in the Indo-Pacific," the group wrote.

The Air Force confirmed plans for a two-year "phased withdrawal" starting this week of F-15C/D Strike Eagles deployed to Kadena Air Base, Okinawa. The Strike Eagles are to be replaced initially by fifth-generation F-22 Raptors

in six-month rotations from Alaska.

The lawmakers' concerns echo those expressed by experts immediately after the announcement.

"The message to China is the U.S. is not serious about reversing the decline in its military forces," David Deptula, former vice commander of Pacific Air Forces and a retired F-15 pilot, told the Financial Times newspaper for a report Oct. 27. "This will encourage the Chinese to take more dramatic action."

A permanent contingent of Air Force fifth-generation fighters west of the International Date Line is a "desirable" option as the U.S. seeks to deter an increasing-

ly assertive China, the head of U.S. Indo-Pacific Command, Adm. John Aquilino, told the Foundation for Defense of Democracies think tank in June.

Kadena is home to 48 F-15C/Ds of the 18th Wing's 44th Fighter Squadron and the 67th Fighter Squadron. The Air Force also has F-16 Fighting Falcons at Misawa Air Base in Honshu, the largest of Japan's four main islands.

"While we agree with the need to modernize the Air Force's fleet in order to counter the rising threat of the [Chinese army], we are concerned with reporting that indicates that there will be no permanent presence to replace the Okinawa F-15s," the lawmakers wrote.

AFN set to launch 'Now' streaming app worldwide

By KELLY AGEE
Stars and Stripes

YOKOTA AIR BASE, Japan — After nearly six weeks of testing by real users in the Pacific, the AFN Now streaming app is ready for its worldwide debut, executives with American Forces Network told Stars and Stripes.

The new app becomes available Monday and will deliver AFN entertainment and news to viewers' smartphones and other mobile devices, network spokesman John Clearwater said in an email Tuesday.

AFN is "working closely" with professional sports and hopes to obtain streaming rights for the app by the time it launches on Monday, he said, adding that the network hopes to stream the Super Bowl on Feb. 12.

AFN Now offers a selection of the programming available on the AFN TV network, including popular programs such as "Jeopardy," "Entertainment Tonight," news programming like "60 Min-

utes," reality TV series, movies and documentaries.

"In just a few minutes users can be watching their favorite shows at the times and locations most convenient to their lifestyles," Clearwater said.

Users need only a mobile device, a network connection and to be verified in the Defense Enrollment Eligibility Reporting System, or DEERS, to register with the app.

AFN Now is free to download from Google Play and the App Store and is compatible with Apple and Android smartphones, tablets, some smart TVs and other in-home media devices, including AppleTV, Roku and Amazon Fire. The network also plans to offer the app through gaming consoles like the Xbox and PlayStation, Clearwater said.

The network established a help line, at (571) 559-1415, a U.S. number accessible to overseas callers.

Air Force to close 9 more inns; group is all in US

By JENNIFER H. SVAN
Stars and Stripes

Nine more Air Force inns are shuttering and others may follow suit as the service struggles to sustain its network of dozens of worldwide lodges without taxpayer funding.

All the inns in the latest closure round are in the United States, the Air Force announced Wednesday.

They are Fort MacArthur Inn at Los Angeles Air Force Base, Calif.; Wingo Inn at Arnold Air Force Base, Tenn.; Hanscom Inn at Hanscom Air Force Base, Mass.; Indian Hills Inn at Tinker Air Force Base and Cherokee Lodge at Vance Air Force Base in Oklahoma.; Warrior Inn at Grand Forks Air Force Base, N.D.; Offutt Inns at Offutt Air Force Base, Neb.; Homestead Inn, Homestead Air Reserve Base, Fla.; and the Hospitality Inn at Pittsburgh Air Reserve Station, Pa.

The goal is to phase out reservations by the end of this month

and close those locations by spring, the Air Force said in a statement.

The Air Force announced in June that it was shutting down the Air Force Inn at Joint Base Anacostia-Bolling in Washington, D.C., and the North Star Inn at Greenland's Thule Air Base.

The latest closures are necessary "to meet a Defense Department requirement that all lodging is self-sustaining without taxpayer funding," the statement said.

In 2018, the Defense Department made changes that took away tax dollar support from military lodges. As a result, nightly rates at some locations more than doubled.

Properties identified for closure had low occupancy in the years before the COVID-19 pandemic, require high maintenance and modernization costs or have fewer than 85 rooms. Off-base lodging availability also was considered.

Biden implores voters to save US democracy

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Warning that democracy itself is in peril, President Joe Biden called on Americans Wednesday night to use their ballots in next week's midterm elections to stand up against lies, violence and dangerous "ultra MAGA" election disruptors who are trying to "succeed where they failed" in subverting the 2020 elections.

This is no time to stand aside, he declared. "Silence is complicity."

After weeks of reassuring talk about America's economy and inflation, Biden turned to a darker, more urgent message, declaring in the final days of midterm election voting that the nation's system of governance is under threat from former President Donald Trump's election-denying lies and the violence Biden said they inspire.

The president singled out "ultra MAGA" Republicans — a reference to Trump's "Make America Great Again" slogan — calling them a minority but "driving force" of the Republican Party.

Pointing in particular to last Friday's attack on House Speaker Nancy Pelosi's husband, Biden said that Trump's false claims about a stolen election have "fueled the dangerous rise of political violence and voter intimidation over the past two years."

"There's an alarming rise in the number of people in this country condoning political violence or simply remaining silent," Biden added. "In our bones we know democracy is at risk, but we also know this: It's in our power to preserve our democracy."

The president's speech — focused squarely on the rite of voting and the counting of that vote — amounted to a plea for Americans to step back from the inflamed rhetoric that has heightened fears of political violence and challenges to the integrity of the elections.

Biden was straddling two roles, speaking as both a president defending the pillars of democracy and a Democrat trying to boost his party's prospects against Republicans.

He called out the hundreds of candidates who have denied the 2020 election result and now refuse to commit to accepting the results of the upcoming midterms.

"This driving force is trying to succeed where they failed in 2020 to suppress the rights of voters and subvert the electoral system itself," Biden said.

"That is the path to chaos in America. It's unprecedented. It's unlawful. And it is un-American."

The speech came days after a man seeking to kidnap House Speaker Pelosi severely

injured her husband, Paul Pelosi, in their San Francisco home in the worst recent example of the political violence that burst forth with the Jan. 6, 2021, insurrection at the Capitol and has continued with alarming, though less-spectacular incidents.

Election workers nationwide have questioned whether to go back to work following increased intimidation and harassment ahead of Election Day. At least five people have been charged with federal crimes for harassing workers as early voting has gotten underway.

Reports of people watching ballot boxes in Arizona, sometimes armed or wearing ballistic vests, have raised serious concerns about voter intimidation. Election officials nationwide are bracing for confrontations at polling sites. A flood of conspiracy theorists have signed up to work as partisan poll watchers.

Emphasizing that it is the first federal election since the Capitol riot and Trump's attempts to overturn the 2020 presidential election, Biden called on voters to reject candidates who have denied the results of the vote, which even Trump's own administration declared to be free of any widespread fraud or interference. Biden asked voters to "think long and hard about the moment we are in."

Slightly fewer Americans apply for unemployment aid

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Applications for jobless benefits fell slightly last week with the U.S. job market remaining resilient in the face of rising interest rates and persistent inflation.

Unemployment claims for the week ending Oct. 29 fell by 1,000 to 217,000 from 218,000 the previous week, the Labor Department reported Thursday. The four-week moving average ticked down by 500 to 218,750.

Considered a proxy for layoffs, applications for jobless claims have remained historically low this year, even as the Federal Reserve has cranked up its benchmark borrowing rate six times this year in its effort to cool the economy and

tame inflation. The Fed on Wednesday raised its short-term lending rate by another 0.75 percentage points, three times its usual margin, for a fourth time this year. Its key rate now stands in a range of 3.75% to 4%, the highest in 15 years. Those increases come as consumer prices remain stubbornly high at 6.2% year-over-year in September, the same as the previous month. Core inflation, which excludes volatile food and energy prices to make the trend clearer, accelerated to 5.1% from August's 4.9%.

All eyes will now turn to the Labor Department's October jobs report Friday, the last peek at the state of the economy ahead of the midterm elections.

Va. governor tip line sees concerns from parents

Associated Press

RICHMOND, Va. — Virginians have used an education tip line Gov. Glenn Youngkin set up to submit concerns about curriculum, remote learning, books, mask policies, teachers and other topics, according to a sampling of emails provided to news outlets as part of a settlement agreement.

Some positive feedback was included in the batch of approximately 350 documents provided this week to news outlets that sued the Republican governor in April seeking disclosure of the information. But the majority of emails expressed anger or frustration with teachers, administrators and school policies, particularly with CO-

VID-19 protocols.

"My children are given busy work, with no new material being taught," a parent from Spotsylvania County wrote in February, objecting to the number of remote learning days at her child's high school.

Youngkin, who campaigned heavily on education and a promise to give parents more sway in their children's curriculums, introduced the tip line soon after he was inaugurated in January. That same month, he touted it as a way to "root out" instances of divisive practices.

A teachers union, Democrats in the General Assembly, some parents and other observers criticized the move as divisive.

Netanyahu's majority firms up in Israel

Associated Press

TEL AVIV, Israel — Israeli election officials were tallying the final votes from national elections on Thursday, with former Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu looking likely to reclaim the premiership with a comfortable majority backed by far-right allies.

A last-minute surprise is still possible, if a small dovish group is able to sneak past the electoral threshold needed to enter parliament and hold back the size of Netanyahu's majority. But the likelihood was small, and members of Netanyahu's expected coalition were already jockeying for portfolios in what will be Israel's most right-wing government.

Israel held its fifth election in four years on Tuesday, a protracted political crisis that

saw voters divided over Netanyahu's fitness to serve while on trial for corruption. Some 90% of ballots were counted by Thursday morning and final results could come later in the day.

As it stands, Netanyahu and his ultranationalist and ultra-Orthodox allies are expected to secure 65 seats in Israel's 120-seat parliament, or Knesset. His opponents in the current coalition, led by caretaker Prime Minister Yair Lapid, were expected to win 50 seats.

Netanyahu's expected win and his likely comfortable majority puts an end to Israel's political instability, for now. But it leaves Israelis split over their leadership and over the values that define their state: Jewish or democratic.

Netanyahu's top partner in the govern-

ment is expected to be the far-right Religious Zionism party. The party's main candidate, Itamar Ben-Gvir, is a disciple of a racist rabbi who says he wants to end Palestinian autonomy in parts of the West Bank and until recently hung a photo in his home of Baruch Goldstein, an American-Israeli who killed 29 Palestinians in a West Bank shooting attack in 1993. Ben-Gvir, who promises to deport Arab legislators, says he wants to be named head of the ministry that is in charge of the police.

Religious Zionism has promised to enact changes to Israeli law that could make Netanyahu's legal woes disappear and, along with other nationalist allies, they want to weaken the independence of the judiciary and concentrate more power in the hands of lawmakers.

Officials says suspected Pelosi attacker in US illegally

The Washington Post

The man accused of attacking House Speaker Nancy Pelosi's husband with a hammer is a Canadian citizen who was in the United States illegally and is facing possible deportation after his criminal cases are resolved, the Department of Homeland Security said late Wednesday.

"U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) lodged an immigration detainer on Canadian national David DePape with San Francisco County Jail, Nov. 1, following his Oct. 28 arrest," DHS officials said in an email.

ICE, which is under Homeland Security, sends "detainers" to state and local law enforcement asking them to notify the agency before releasing a foreign citizen who could

also be deported. Deportations are civil proceedings that often take place after criminal cases are resolved, but immigrants also have been detained after they post bail.

DePape, 42, is facing state and federal criminal charges in the gruesome attack on Paul Pelosi, 82, early Friday morning, and for threatening Nancy Pelosi. DePape has pleaded not guilty and remains in custody.

Relatives have told the media that DePape grew up in British Columbia, Canada's westernmost province, but his trajectory to Northern California has remained a mystery.

Federal records show that DePape entered the United States legally on March 8, 2008, via Mexico. He crossed at the San Ysidro port of entry, an official border crossing that links San Diego County with Tijuana.

Canadians traveling for business or pleasure generally do not require visas, officials said, and he was admitted as a "temporary visitor," traveling for pleasure, DHS said.

Canadians admitted for pleasure are generally permitted to stay for up to six months. DHS did not say when DePape's permission to stay in the U.S. expired.

The Canadian government confirmed this week that they were working on DePape's case.

Federal authorities on Monday filed attempted kidnapping and assault charges against DePape, alleging he broke into the Pelosi home, bludgeoned her husband with a hammer in front of police, and then said he wanted to break Nancy Pelosi's kneecaps as a warning to other Democrats.

Former Pakistan PM Imran Khan wounded in shooting

Associated Press

ISLAMABAD — A gunman in eastern Pakistan opened fire Thursday at a campaign truck carrying former Prime Minister Imran Khan, slightly wounding him in the leg and killing one of his supporters, his party and police said. Nine other people also were hurt.

The gunman was immediately arrested at the scene, and police later released a video of him in custody, allegedly confessing to the shooting and saying he acted alone. It was not clear under what conditions he

made his statement.

"Only Imran Khan was my target," said the suspect, identified as Faisal Butt by Information Minister Maryam Aurangzeb.

The attack raised new concerns about growing political instability in Pakistan since Khan's ouster in a no-confidence vote in Parliament in April.

Since then, he has mobilized mass rallies across the nuclear-armed nation of 225 million, whipping up crowds with claims that he was a victim of a conspiracy by his successor, Prime Minister Shahbaz Sharif, and

the United States. Both the new premier and Washington have denied the allegations.

Pakistan has a decades-long history of political assassinations, including that of Benazir Bhutto, the first democratically elected female leader of a Muslim country, in 2007.

Khan was later seen with a bandage on his right leg, just above the foot, according to reports and a blurry image. He was moved to another vehicle from his truck, from where announcements were being made that he was safe.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

2 get prison for shipping ivory, rhino horns

WA SEATTLE — Two foreign nationals from the Democratic Republic of Congo who pleaded guilty in federal court in Seattle to participating in a smuggling ring that brought illegal ivory, rhinoceros horn and pangolin scales into the U.S. have been sentenced.

Herdade Lokua was sentenced to 20 months and Jospin Mujangi was sentenced to 14 months in prison on Tuesday, the Justice Department said.

They both pleaded guilty in July to two counts of an 11-count indictment alleging they worked with a middleman to ship poached items to Seattle.

The court determined Lokua was the organizer of a trafficking operation with more than five other co-conspirators who sought to ship elephant ivory, white rhinoceros horn and pangolin scales to Seattle. Mujangi helped package the wildlife products and handled the financial details.

Officials said the men acknowledged that from November 2019 through June 2021, they shipped 49 pounds of ivory from Kinshasa, arranging for the tusks to be cut into smaller pieces, painted black, and labeled as imported wood. In June 2021, they brought in rhino horns and discussed a shipment of ivory and pangolin scales, the Justice Department said.

Mayor arrested in alleged road rage shooting

OR RUFUS — The mayor of a rural Oregon town is facing accusations of attempted murder following a road rage incident Monday night.

The Hood River County Sheriff's Office said Rufus Mayor Do-

wen Jones was arrested Tuesday for allegedly firing multiple rounds from a handgun at a passing vehicle near Parkdale, KPTV reported.

Deputies said two adults and two children at about 8:45 p.m. were traveling south of Hood River on Highway 281 following an SUV that was driving erratically. The SUV then abruptly pulled over.

Deputies said the family's vehicle slowed to get a description to report to authorities but Jones stepped out of the vehicle and fired the weapon at the family's car, damaging it. No one was hurt.

Pretend student lived in dorms for 10 months

CA STANFORD — A man pretended to be a student and lived in several Stanford University dorms for at least 10 months, a university official said Tuesday.

The university's Department of Public Safety cited the man for violating the law the first time he was found living in a dorm in December 2021, but that didn't deter him, Stanford spokeswoman Dee Mostofi said in a statement.

Since then, campus police officers have obtained multiple stay-away letters, a prerequisite to citing someone for trespass on campus, but they weren't able to locate the man until recently. They gave him a stay-away letter and removed him from campus, Mostofi said.

She said the university has protocols and policies to prevent non-students from entering and living in the dorms, but that the man's "persistence and ability to ingratiate himself with our student community has made it clear that gaps exist in those protocols."

Man gets 40 years for shooting federal officers

TN JACKSON — A man has been sentenced to 40 years in federal prison for shooting two deputy U.S. Marshals during a standoff at a duplex in West Tennessee, prosecutors said.

Bobby Joe Claybrook Jr., 41, had pleaded guilty to assault on a federal officer with a deadly weapon and discharging a weapon during a violent crime stemming from a November 2020 shooting, the U.S. attorney's office said in a news release.

Authorities said federal agents and local law enforcement went to a duplex in Jackson to serve arrest warrants for Claybrook on attempted homicide and weapons charges. Before the agents knocked on the door, Claybrook fired on the team through a small porch window. Two officers were shot. They were treated for their wounds at a hospital and released, prosecutors said.

Officials: 'Rolling road rage situation' injured boy

NC HILLSBOROUGH — A man fired at a car he was chasing Monday night, leaving a child with a minor injury, a North Carolina sheriff's office said.

During the "rolling road rage situation" that began in the Hillsborough area around 7 p.m. Monday, Kelly Long, 41, of Hurdle Mills, fired several times at an occupied vehicle, the Orange County Sheriff's Office said in a news release.

After the chase, the other driver pulled over at a gas station and deputies responded, officials said. The driver initially reported no injuries, but deputies found a projectile lodged in the back of a

safety seat and a corresponding minor injury to the back of the driver's 4-year-old child, officials said. The boy was treated on the scene, officials said.

A deputy found shell casings in the roadway and contacted a resident whose security system captured video footage of the vehicles as they passed by, officials said.

Early Tuesday, investigators arrested Long and charged him with four counts of assault with a deadly weapon with intent to kill.

Law enforcement officers honored for bravery

MA WORCESTER — A retired Massachusetts state trooper who was killed in what authorities described as a shooting motivated by racism, and an officer who drowned while trying to save the life of a teenager were honored Tuesday with awards for exemplary acts of bravery.

A total of 32 Massachusetts law enforcement personnel were named recipients of the annual George L. Hanna Memorial Award for Bravery.

Retired state Trooper David L. Green, 68, left his Winthrop home in June 2021 to investigate a truck crash and was shot multiple times by a white man who authorities say had expressed antisemitic and anti-Black views. Green and Ramona Cooper, a 60-year-old Air Force veteran, were killed. Both were Black.

Worcester Police Officer Emmanuel Familia was one of several city officers who were honored for their efforts to save drowning teens at Green Hill Park in June 2021. Although two teens were rescued, Familia died trying to rescue a 14-year-old boy who also died.

— From wire reports

STARS AND STRIPES®

Single source convenience, reliably independent. Visit www.stripes.com.

Reporting
World, National
and Military News

Astros no-hit Phillies, even series at 2-2

Associated Press

PHILADELPHIA — Hammered the night before, Cristian Javier and the Houston Astros desperately needed to figure how to keep Bryce Harper and the Phillies in the ballpark.

How about a no-hitter, would that do?

Javier and Houston's bullpen combined on just the second no-hitter in World Series history, silencing a booming lineup and boisterous fans as the Astros blanked Philadelphia 5-0 Wednesday night to even the matchup at two games each.

"You get slapped in the face yesterday and you want to come back today and make a statement," closer Ryan Pressly said.

The only previous no-hitter in the World Series was a perfect game by Don Larsen of the New York Yankees against the Brooklyn Dodgers in 1956.

Javier and three relievers weren't perfect in Game 4, but they were close.

Plus, they'd done this before: Javier, the starter in a combined no-hitter against the New York Yankees in June, was pulled with a no-hitter in progress after six innings and 97 pitches this time.

Bryan Abreu, Rafael Montero and Pressly each followed with a hitless inning for the first combined no-hitter in postseason play. Astros arms totaled 14 strikeouts and three walks in ensuring this year's championship will be decided this weekend back at Minute Maid Park.

Soon after J.T. Realmuto grounded out to end it, the quartet of pitchers posed with catcher Christian Vázquez near the visiting dugout, each putting a hand on the game ball for a photo. It's a picture no one could've envisioned 24 hours earlier,

when Philadelphia clubbed a Series record-tying five home runs in a 7-0 romp in Game 3.

"That's crazy, man," Vázquez said. "It was special."

The four pitchers and Vázquez also signed a ball headed to the Hall of Fame.

In 2010, Roy Halladay pitched a no-hitter for the Phillies in the NL Division Series, also here at Citizens Bank Park. Halladay's gem came against a Cincinnati team managed by Dusty Baker, Houston's current skipper.

With Larsen and the Houston combo, those are the only three no-hitters in the postseason.

The closest the Phillies came to a hit was in the third inning, when Kyle Schwarber grounded a hard foul past first base. On fair balls, nothing.

"It's cool," Schwarber said, sarcastically. "We'll be in the history books, I guess."

By the time Javier exited, the lone hit maker on the Philadelphia side who showed up on the scoreboard was rocker Bruce Springsteen, pictured surrounded by Phillies fans.

And a few innings later, as fans started leaving the stadium, there actually were boos for postseason star Harper and the Phillies. First lady Jill Biden, a noted Phillies fan, was among those in the crowd of 45,693 who had little to shout about.

Alex Bregman delivered the big hit Houston hoped for, a two-run double in a five-run fifth inning, and that was plenty for the Astros.

Completely in charge, Javier struck out nine — including five straight — walked two and hardly allowed any loud contact. He tamed a club that had been 6-0 at home this postseason while hitting 17 home runs.

Georgia, Tennessee put their title hopes on line

Associated Press

ATHENS, Ga. — Georgia coach Kirby Smart just smiled and shook his head when asked if he has stressed conditioning in preparation for Saturday's visit from Tennessee and its fast-paced offense.

Smart knows that one week would not have been enough to prepare his Bulldogs for the challenge in the much-anticipated matchup between No. 1 Georgia and No. 2 Tennessee. That extra conditioning work began last summer and has continued through the season.

"If they're not in shape, then you did something wrong long before (this week)," Smart said. "So we've been building towards this week ... since week one, the conditioning level of our players has been a concern every week for me. It's one of the major concerns, Are you in good enough shape? Because if you're not, you can't make it up in one week."

Led by quarterback Hendon Hooker, Tennessee (8-0, 4-0 Southeastern Conference, No. 1 College Football Playoff) averages a play about every 10 seconds, making it difficult for defenses to substitute players. The pace wears down defenses, helping the

Vols lead the nation with 49.4 points per game.

Hooker said the Vols are "playing with a chip on our shoulder day in and day out. We just always feel like we have something to prove and that just fuels us to go work hard every day."

Georgia (8-0, 5-0, No. 3 CFP) has reloaded after having eight players from its national championship defense selected in this year's NFL Draft, including five in the first round. Overall, Georgia had a record 15 players taken in the draft.

Despite the heavy losses on defense, the Bulldogs rank second in the nation with their average of 10.50 points allowed.

Neither team is one-dimensional. Tennessee's defense is coming off perhaps its best game of the season in a 44-6 rout of then-No. 19 Kentucky last week.

Led by senior quarterback Stetson Bennett, Georgia ranks sixth in the nation with its average of 41.6 points per game and second, behind Tennessee, with 530.1 yards per game.

Balance has both teams in position to contend for SEC and national championships. Even so, the spotlight will be on the Vols'

high-scoring offense — and the conditioning of the Bulldogs' defense.

Hooker's leadership on the field has helped the Vols require 2 minutes or less on 35 of their 63 scoring drives this season.

Hooker passed for five touchdowns in Tennessee's 52-49 win over Alabama on Oct. 15.

"He's become a guy that's operating as highly and as effectively as anybody in the country," said Tennessee coach Josh Heupel of Hooker.

Hooker in charge

Hooker transferred to Tennessee from Virginia Tech to play for Jeremy Pruitt and stuck around to play for Heupel. It's paid off for both coach and quarterback.

Hooker is 14-5 as a starter since coming off the bench last season. He has thrown 219 passes this season with only one interception, and he leads the SEC with his average of 334.5 yards of total offense.

Hooker leads the nation with 10.7 yards per pass attempt and his 292.2 yards passing per game ranks third in the SEC. He also leads the nation with 23 plays of 30 yards or longer and 15 passes of 40 yards or longer.

Hockenson giddy over joining Vikings

Associated Press

EAGAN, Minn. — The heavy playbook study sessions facing T.J. Hockenson this week weren't much of a worry at all for Minnesota's newly acquired tight end.

Hockenson could hardly hide his smile on Wednesday, the first full day of his fast-tracked initiation. He has the opportunity to play home games one state away from his native Iowa. He has joined a Vikings team his father rooted for as a child with a bedroom painted purple and yellow.

Then there's the NFC North standings: going from 1-6 one day to 6-1 the next.

"Really what we're here to do is go somewhere and win some games. That's kind of the first time I've been able to say that," said Hockenson, who arrived in Minnesota on Tuesday after a trade with Detroit. The Lions were 12-42-2 since Hockenson was drafted eighth overall in 2019.

"I'm just excited to have a piece in this puzzle. A lot of good guys around here. This facility is beautiful, so I'm just excited to be here, man," Hockenson said. "There's no-

where I'd rather be."

Hockenson hails from Chariton, a small farming town in southern Iowa about a 4½-hour drive from Minneapolis. His parents, Teri and Tod, attend all of his games, so their commute will be cut by more than half of the length of the trip to Detroit. When the Lions played at Minnesota in Week 3, Hockenson had to buy about 30 tickets.

"We can't make that a habit," he said, "but there's going to be a lot of people here."

The Vikings don't play at home again until Nov. 20 against Dallas, but his mother and father are planning to be at Washington for the game this Sunday.

Hockenson's crash course in the new offense was softened a bit by his appreciation of head coach Kevin O'Connell, for whom his former quarterback Matthew Stafford played last year with the Rams. Still, the "drinking from a fire hydrant" challenge of changing teams midseason is real.

"It's one thing to be able to see it on paper and say, 'OK, oh, yeah, I got it,' but then you hear it and you have to mentally decipher

everything. It's a different story," Hockenson said. "So it's definitely a process, and I'm starting."

The Vikings now have another proven field-stretching option for quarterback Kirk Cousins to pass to and help keep some of the opposing defensive attention off wide receiver Justin Jefferson and running back Dalvin Cook.

"It's early right now, but I definitely feel that he's a good fit," Cousins said.

With 395 receiving yards, Hockenson has the highest seven-game total of his career. He has a league-leading average of 15.2 yards per catch among qualifying tight ends. Hockenson made the Pro Bowl in 2020 and has 2,068 receiving yards and 15 touchdowns on 186 catches in 47 games.

The Vikings are last in the NFL with an average of 7.3 yards per reception by a tight end, according to Sportradar data. Their primary tight end Irv Smith Jr. suffered a serious ankle sprain on Sunday and will miss a minimum of one month on injured reserve.

Jets' Gardner cooking with hot start to rookie season

Associated Press

Joe Douglas was a fan of Ahmad "Sauce" Gardner when he watched the cornerback's film at the University of Cincinnati.

Then the Jets general manager saw him in person. And he knew he'd be the perfect fit for New York with the No. 4 overall pick.

"Just from the minute you meet Sauce, you fall in love with the energy, the enthusiasm, the confidence, the authenticity that he brings," Douglas said. "And you see that carry over. And then when you add that to the field with his natural instincts, his length, his play speed, it has come together to be a really outstanding start to an NFL career."

Gardner is widely considered the front-runner for AP Defensive Rookie of the Year. He has shown the poise of a veteran since Week 1, regularly clamping down on receivers while very much looking like a shutdown cornerback.

According to Next Gen Stats, Gardner ranks first among all NFL cornerbacks in man coverage — as the nearest coverage defender — in yards allowed (13), yards allowed per snap (0.2) and yards allowed per target (0.9).

He twice has been voted the NFL's rookie

of the week, and is earning raves from reporters and opponents for his playmaking ability.

"When you build a team, you're looking at a corner that can lock it down over there," Buffalo coach Sean McDermott said. "And he's a No. 1 corner for them, it appears. And he's been all that's been advertised about him."

McDermott and the Bills will get their first up-close look at Gardner on Sunday when Buffalo plays at New York. Gardner and D.J. Reed, a free-agent offseason signing, have combined to help give the Jets a surprisingly impressive secondary.

"It's our love for the game, you know?" Gardner said. "We're going out there, having fun and doing the things we love to do."

But Gardner, who has faced the likes of the Bengals' Ja'Marr Chase and the Dolphins' Jaylen Waddle and Tyreek Hill, will get another major test when he finds himself lined up against Stefon Diggs throughout the game at MetLife Stadium.

"He's a good receiver," Gardner said. "He knows how to run routes, a smart receiver, just like the rest of the guys in the league."

Gardner oozes confidence, never appear-

ing as though the moment is too big. After all, he never allowed a touchdown his entire three-year college career. It's a coolness you want from a cornerback, especially in high-pressure situations against some of the NFL's elite playmakers.

"His competitiveness, his will to win, you see this, and I feel like he has a charisma and guys tend to gravitate toward him just because he's authentic," Douglas said. "He's the real deal. There's nothing fake about his confidence, his toughness, his anything."

"He's a genuine article and I feel like we have quite a few guys on the team that are wired that way, and Sauce is definitely one of them."

Gardner, who has one interception, is tied with Dallas' Trevon Diggs for the NFL lead with 12 passes defended, and that's after the Jets rookie was held without one for the first time this season in the game against New England. Gardner was the first rookie since 2000 to have at least one pass defended in each of his first seven games.

"He's off to a very good start," McDermott said. "So he'll be tough to deal with in the years to come, for sure, and already is this year."

Bucks rely on defense to stay unbeaten

Associated Press

MILWAUKEE — Giannis Antetokounmpo insists he still isn't in a rhythm, even as statistics suggest he's off to perhaps the best start of his career. Khris Middleton still isn't in uniform as he recovers from offseason wrist surgery.

Yet the Milwaukee Bucks still have played well enough to become the NBA's last unbeaten team.

The Bucks (7-0) benefited from having a season-high, six-game homestand immediately after opening with a 90-88 triumph at Philadelphia. They closed that stretch Wednesday night by beating the Detroit Pistons 116-91.

"I'm happy that the team is winning, but that's like second," Antetokounmpo said. "I'm happy that the team is building good habits. I'm happy that we can be good even if we don't make shots, that it doesn't affect us. We still play hard, we still move the ball.

Guys are not talking by themselves, we talk to one another. We are in a very good place."

Milwaukee's 7-0 season-opening run matches the starts of the 2018-19 and 1971-72 teams.

Jrue Holiday, who was uncertain to play Wednesday because of a non-COVID-19 illness, added 26 points.

"I think some of it's mental," Holiday said. "Knowing that, through a winning streak, you don't always look pretty. I think that sometimes you make mistakes, you still come out with the outcome that you want. I feel like that builds confidence, knowing that you can go into any game and really feel like you can win any game any type of way."

The Bucks have capitalized on a defense that has grown stingier with the return of a healthy Brook Lopez.

"Our team is definitely the best defensive team in the NBA," Lopez said Monday after the Bucks' 110-108 victory over the Pistons.

"That's something we can do every night, regardless of how we're shooting."

The Bucks entered Wednesday's games leading the NBA in scoring defense (103.8) and field-goal percentage defense (.423). Lopez has a league-high 3.3 blocks per game after recovering from a back injury that required surgery and limited him to 13 regular-season games last year.

That's enabled the Bucks to remain unbeaten even while ranking just 23rd in field-goal percentage (.451) and 24th in three-point percentage (.335). Antetokounmpo has said he wants the Bucks to have a suffocating defense as their identity rather than assuming they can beat teams by scoring in bunches every night.

"I've been a part of a team like that. The 2019-2020 team, we were a team that scored a lot of points and we beat everybody by 12-13-15 points on average," Antetokounmpo said last week, referring to a season in which the

Bucks posted the NBA's best regular-season record but lost in the second round of the playoffs.

"But at the end of the day, it comes down to stops, who get the most stops down the stretch, who makes that extra effort, who's going to dive for the ball, who's going to cover for one another, who's going to rebound the ball better, who's going to get more 50-50 balls."

That defense has helped Milwaukee withstand the absences of Middleton and Pat Connaughton, who also hasn't played yet this season due to a strained right calf.

Of course, it helps to have arguably the world's best player on your roster.

Antetokounmpo, the Eastern Conference player of the week, scored 151 points in a four-game run that ended Saturday with a 123-115 triumph over the Atlanta Hawks. That's his highest career point total over a four-game span.

Eichel leads way with revolutionary neck surgery

Associated Press

Jack Eichel argued and argued with his former team, and even with the league, for the right to undergo neck surgery that had never before been performed on an NHL player.

The procedure Eichel wanted — the one he expected to get him back on the ice in a fraction of the time over the more-accepted standard of fusion surgery — is called artificial disk replacement and he eventually got it.

Given the success it has brought the talented forward, it could very well be referred to by another name now: The Jack Eichel Surgery.

The sharpshooting center for Vegas by way of Buffalo may be doing for lower backs and necks what Tommy John once did for the elbows of baseball pitchers — save careers.

"A year ago nobody had had it, and now all of a sudden, three guys have had it," said Eichel, who scored the overtime winner with seven seconds left Sunday as the Golden Knights moved to 8-2 atop the Western

Conference. "It's a more common injury than you think and it's a good way to resolve that injury, so I'm happy that guys had the opportunity to do it."

Others are already following his lead. Chicago forward Tyler Johnson underwent the procedure last December, and Philadelphia's Joel Farabee had it in June.

The road to being a pioneer among his peers wasn't exactly smooth for Eichel. He switched agents to Pat Brisson in August 2021, and yet the duo was still unable to convince Buffalo team physicians it was safe to insert an artificial disk into Eichel's neck.

The reason for the reluctance: the question of whether the disk would hold up to the rigors of the league. No NHL player had ever had it before, and the Sabres also were hesitant to risk Eichel's trade value.

ADR surgery isn't new. Developed decades ago, it has been used on injured extreme athletes (think mountain bikers, big-wave surfers), military pilots and casual athletes just looking to swing a golf club or tennis racket pain-free again.

The surgery can put hockey players back

in uniform in three months. With fusion surgery, where surgeons permanently connect two or more vertebrae, it can take six months or longer before a return, and could require follow-up procedures later in life.

Eichel did his homework and was insistent the ADR route was what he wanted. Frequently, teams acquiesce, but in this case there was built-up animosity between the two sides in what was an ugly divorce, with the Sabres holding the final say. One reason the NHL Players' Association didn't escalate it to a grievance was because the Sabres continued paying Eichel his contract while he was essentially waiting for a trade.

That came a year ago, when Eichel was dealt to Vegas on Nov. 4. Eight days later, he underwent ADR surgery. Three months after that, he skated nearly 18 minutes for the Golden Knights against the eventual Stanley Cup champion Colorado Avalanche.

"I give Jack a lot of credit for being a stubborn student of what he was going to do to his body," Brisson said. "He was patient, and he fought a pretty lengthy battle."